THE ASYLUM

Quarterly Journal of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society

Volume II, Number 1 **Spring 1982**

THE CROSBYS OF CHARLESTOWN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

by Robert I. Wester

This family portrait was taken in October, 1860 on the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of Rev. Dr. Jaazaniah Crosby (seated center). His son, Sylvester, is standing behind him.

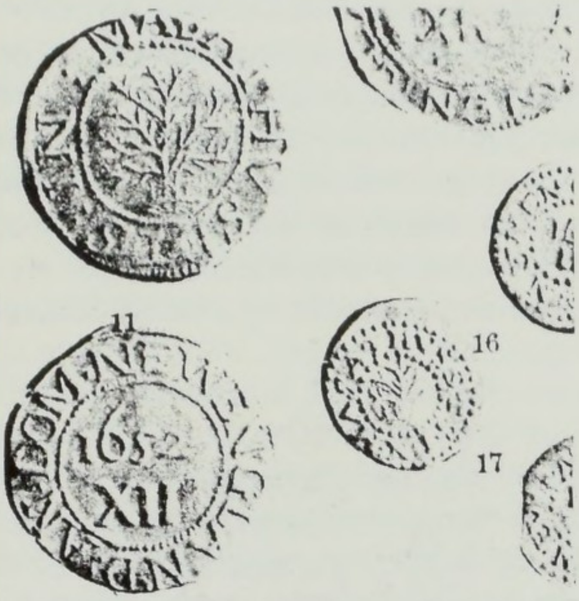
Sylvester Sage Crosby was born in the late winter of 1824. He was named after his maternal grandfather, Reverend Sylvester Sage of Westminster, Vermont. Unfortunately, Sylvester died on April 7, 1825 at only 13 months of age.

Sylvester's father, Jaazaniah, was born in Hebron, New Hampshire on April 3, 1780. At the age of 18, Jaazaniah walked 80 miles to Phillips Exeter Academy to begin his theological training. Two years later he entered Harvard College, graduating with the class of 1804. He was ordained Pastor of the parish in Charlestown, New Hampshire on the 17th of October, 1810.

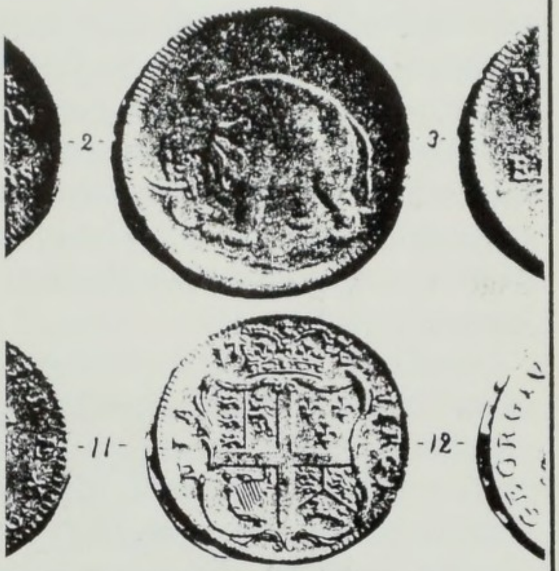
SYLVESTER S. CROSBY'S HELIOTYPE ILLUSTRATIONS
by Eric P. Newman

The renewed enthusiasm for original issues of *The Early Coins of America* by Sylvester Sage Crosby has stimulated further bibliographical research on that monumental publication prepared from 1873 to 1875.

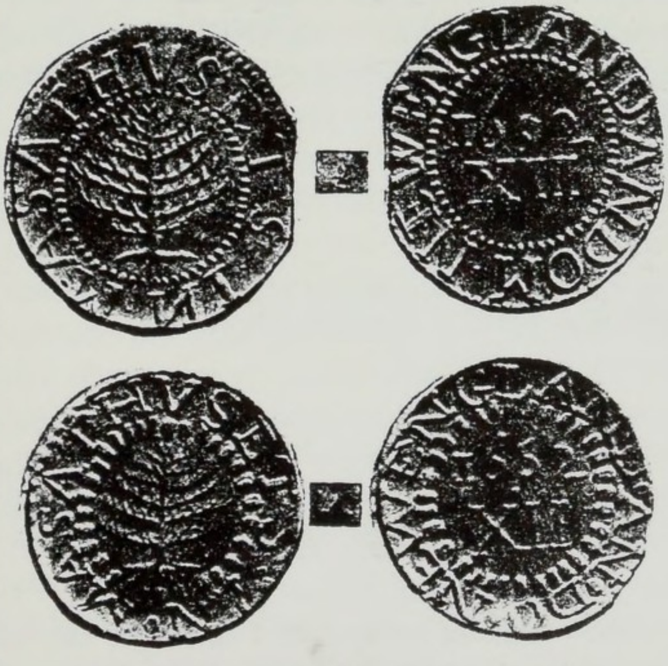
One of its curiosities is the saga of the ten plates of coins for the book and the obvious problems which arose in preparing them. These problems are evident from the many variations in the plates which were published one at a time in numerical sequence with each part of the book. To make multiple copies of these photographic images the Heliotype Patent had been used.



Overprinted coin number poorly registered



Handwritten coin numbers



Printed numbers pasted on

PLATE I.

Small overprinted plate number

PLATE II.

Small size plate number pasted on

PLATE IX.

Large overprinted plate number

On Plate I, the coin numbering and the two items of text on the background of the plate as well as the plate number in the top margin seem to be overprinted onto the heliotyped images. On Plate II and Plate III the coin numbers, text items and plate numbers were printed first, then cut out and pasted onto the coin background before the negative was made. From Plate VI onward the coin numbering is handwritten on the background before the negative was made while the plate numbers and the words HELIOTYPE PATENT seem to be overprinted after the heliotyping. There had to be a good reason for these and other changes because Crosby, being a perfectionist, naturally wanted the plates to be a major element in his book.

The exposition of the details observed in some of these plates is presented as a challenge to bibliophiles and to owners of original issues or original loose plates to help piece together what occurred.

The Heliotype process was invented in England in 1869 by Ernest Edwards. Bichromated gelatin was placed upon a waxed glass plate and exposed to the sun from the back through a negative photographic film. The gelatin was stripped off the glass and attached by a rubberized solution to a flat pewter plate. The unexposed gelatin was washed away with warm water leaving unaffected the areas of the bichromated gelatin which had been exposed to light. This produced a surface which would hold ink on the areas which were to be dark in the illustrations and be usable for printing multiple copies.

In an examination of a number of examples of Plate I, it becomes clear that some of the overprinting is off register as evidenced by the coin numbers touching or slightly overlapping some coin illustrations or not being centered between the obverse and reverse images. Since the overprinting apparently had to be done sheet by sheet a new procedure was adopted to avoid the registry problem. This new procedure involved pasted labels. What was originally overprinted was first printed on a blank sheet, cut out and pasted in a proper position on the background of the pieces to be illustrated. Then the negative and heliotype were made and no overprinting was necessary. This is clearly evident on Plate II and Plate III and on a few examples of Plate IV. A glance at these plates indicates the result was a disaster, as some numbering and text was discolored, unattractive and almost illegible.

Most examples of Plate IV and Plate V have overprinted coin numbers, plate numbers and other text, using the same method employed in making Plate I. Apparently the original technique was reused because the change in Plates II and III had not improved it. Since it was necessary to include many coins onto each subsequent plate the registry problem in overprinting remained critical as to coin numbering. Thus another procedure was tried out, further revising prior methods. The coin numbering was applied to the background with handwritten ink numbers before photography. This included ink lines pointing to each obverse and reverse pairing. The plate number and HELIOTYPE PATENT text could then be overprinted onto the top and bottom margins of the heliotype without causing a complex registry problem. This procedure was used in preparing a few specimens of Plate V and apparently all of Plates VI, VII, VIII, IX and X.

Additional evidence that overprinting was used after the heliotype plates were prepared is shown by a remaining example of an error in overprinting. There exists an unbound heliotype of the coins belonging on Plate V which includes handwritten coin numbering and on that example there is an erroneously overprinted PLATE IX in the top margin and HELIOTYPE PATENT is printed in the center of the bottom margin. When this plate was corrected with the proper plate number, the HELIOTYPE PATENT imprint was moved nearer to the left side of the bottom margin. These differences further confirm that overprinting was used.

Reprints of Crosby cannot be relied upon for studying some of the actual variations in plates as certain liberties were taken in the reprints by cropping plates, moving or removing marginal imprints and making peripheral paste-up changes.

Great care has been taken in this commentary to avoid stating whether the coins themselves, foil pressings, electrotype shells or other substitutes were used to make the photographic images for the plates. It has long been noticed that the edge on the left side, particularly the lower left side, of many coin illustrations has an applied darkening. Others have an uneven shadow in this area. It is obvious that the illustration of the obverse and reverse of the same coin make it impossible to make the plate from one exposure of the original coin. It also can be observed that there are no light and dark surface variations in the field of the coins as would normally be seen, except on Plate V coin 25. This would tend to show the use of a substitute for actual coins. There is a possible clue in the July 26, 1869 letter (see Bibliographical Appendix of the 1975 Quarterman Reprint of Crosby) from Crosby stating, "I should also like impressions of such pieces in tin or copper foil, as an aid determining more minute pecularities and *** to favor me with impressions, or where that is impractical, with rubbings of such coins." Were exposures of each side of each coin or impression made first and combined in a negative or were positive prints combined and rephotographed? Were the group of coins or impressions photographed with one exposure for each plate?

It would be interesting to have someone clear up the method of reproduction used to make the plates or to find other curiosities in the procedures used in making the plates.

RARE GILHOUSEN WORK DISCOVERED

by Mike Carter, NLG

An important and historic book by Clarence E. Gilhousen, owner of the famous Gilhousen Coin Collection auctioned by Superior Stamp & Coin Co., ov Beverly Hills, in 1973, has been discovered by this author in the extensive coin research library of Superior. The book, entitled *Gold and Silver Coins of the World,* measures 12½" x 11" and is bound in richly-grained black leather with gold titling, raised bands, and the name C. E. Gilhousen on the spine. On the title page is a handwritten message from Mr. Gilhousen to his wife which reads: